

ECUMENICAL PRESS SERVICE

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August 8th, 1958

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US Protestant Leaders Propose Constructive Action in Middle East

(New York) - Six Protestant leaders in the USA, who have sent a message to the US State Department on their own combined initiative, have made ten points about promotion of welfare and peace in the Middle East.

The message, drawn up by a group in New York, has been circulated among 3,000 Christian leaders. According to Dr. O. Frederick Nolde, director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, a joint agency of the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council, he and five others prepared the statement in response to queries from Christian leaders all over the USA, following the critical developments in the Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan.

The five other individuals who signed the statement in a personal capacity were Dr. Roswell P. Barnes, who is executive secretary of the World Council of Churches in the USA; Dr. Alford Carleton, executive vice-president of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; Dr. Richard M. Fagley, executive secretary of the CCIA; Mrs. Elizabeth K. Kinnear, associate secretary, Joint Office for Southern Asia and the Near East of the Division of Foreign Missions of the National Council of Churches; and Dr. Glora M. Wysner, secretary of the International Missionary Council.

The full text of the statement is on Page 5.

E.P.S., Geneva

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Freedom of faith and of conscience. Unhindered practice of one's religion is guaranteed by the Republic.

The Church representatives made certain complaints about the application of the decree passed on February 12, 1958, by the Minister of Education to the maintenance of order and continuity in the education given in the normal schools. It was promised that these complaints would be examined.

Other outstanding questions were referred to the Secretary of State for Church Affairs and to the agencies concerned, which will respond and deal with them. Both sides declared themselves ready to hold further explanatory discussions, in order to remove any causes of friction in the relations between State and Church.

3.7.8., Geneva

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Dibelius Says Wars Not Inevitable

(Gütersloh, Germany) - Bishop Otto Dibelius of Berlin has attacked the view that war is inevitable until the end of the world.

Replying in the paper "Kirche und Mann" to Professor Jacob of Münster, who had criticised him for telling the all-German synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) that the Church must preach a new conception of international fellowship and remove the causes of war, the bishop said that the Bible no-where taught the inevitability of war.

"It is one of the results of God's great mercy," Bishop Dibelius wrote, "that just as He heals diseases, so He also directs the course of war all over the world. When a new age dawns humanity will be liberated from this scourge. That is what the Bible says! But it does not say anywhere that we should not attack disease and pestilence and hunger on the pretext that they are sent by God and will therefore always be with us. Nor does the Bible say anywhere that it is godless Utopianism to arouse people's consciences against war. The fact that there will be no more war at the end of the world does not mean that until then there will always be wars!"

According to Bishop Dibelius, the words of Jesus, "Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars", mean that war will be "something very unusual, not something of everyday occurrence".

The bishop declared that "on no account should Christians obstruct the efforts of those who are trying to solve this great problem by maintaining that according to the Bible there will always be wars". E.P.S., Geneva

South Africa's DRC Rebukes Dr. Fisher

(Johannesburg) - Under the heading, "He Should Know Better", the Monthly Newsletter of the Dutch Reformed Church of the Transvaal takes sharp exception to a criticism voiced by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, in a recent television interview.

As a result of the description he gave of the church's support of apartheid, the archbishop is accused of being "grossly ill-informed on the policy of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa".

In the interview Dr. Fisher had said: "I am afraid ... that that church has not got very much further than the Old Testament and not much further than the Book of Judges. They really believe that the Bantu, the Africans, are meant to be inferior in status forever. Against them are ranged all other Christian bodies in the country, who say the principle of apartheid is wrong because every race is equal in the love of God."

The Dutch Reformed Church's newsletter comments: "If the archbishop had taken the trouble to look at the official report of the church on race relations (which is obtainable from the Information Bureau and has been widely distributed overseas) he would have seen that the report contains 56 references to the New Testament and only eight to the Old Testament."

The newsletter's comment goes on to say that Dr. Fisher would also have read a passage that says:

"All men are created in the image of God and as such there is no respect of persons with God. In the sense of Creator God is the Father of all mankind and

all men are of equal worth; but in the sense of the New Testament childhood and brotherhood He is the Father of the believers alone ... The Church of Christ, gathered together from all the peoples of the earth, forms a unity, and this unity of his mystic body, the communion of saints (koinonia), must always receive the greatest emphasis ... This regenerating grace should be especially revealed in the Church of Christ in that the superior or stronger, in full responsibility to God and true love towards his neighbour, will educate and in every respect uplift the inferior or weaker so as to become a worthy fellow-member of the body of Christ."

The DRC's 1950 conference on race relations is also quoted as saying that "the rights of no man may be denied; there can be no subservience in any sphere of life".

The newsletter's reply concludes by saying: "These quotations show that the archbishop is completely misinformed and that his allegations have no valid basis whatsoever". E.P.S., Geneva

Inter-racial Work Camp in South Africa

(Roodepoort, Transvaal) - For the ninth year people from Afrikaans, English-speaking, Indian and indigenous African groups have taken part in a construction project at the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre in the Transvaal.

This year's work camp, held in July for three weeks, brought twenty-two campers together to help build a new ablution block for the Christian conference centre. Participants came from nine different denominations in the Cape, Natal, the South African protectorates, the Transvaal, England and the USA. Two exchange students from the Lebanon also took part.

As in all ecumenical work camps, the programme included Bible study, discussion and worship. E.P.S., Geneva

Laymen's Week at Brussels Protestant Pavilion

(Brussels) - The emphasis on the laity as evangelists and witnesses is one of the distinctive features of Protestantism, opening speakers at Laymen's Week at the Protestant pavilion at the Brussels World Fair agreed.

Speakers included Mrs. Theodore O. Wedel, of Washington, D.C., president of the United Church Women of the United States, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, well-known US preacher and writer, and Mrs. Peale, Mrs. Hanna Kiep, woman's affairs attaché for Germany in the USA, and Pastor Pieter Fagel, deputy commissioner general of the Protestant pavilion. "Partners in Christ" was the theme for Laymen's Week, which extended from August 2-8, with programmes of music and drama, together with discussion groups, sermons and worship services.

Mrs. Peale told the audience at the opening meeting on August 2 that church women in America had introduced a spiritual dimension into the nation's life. She described the growth of the World Day of Prayer since it was started a quarter of a century ago. "Women are dedicated to placing a spiritual emphasis throughout church life," she said.

The controversial question of women as ordained ministers was introduced by Pastor Fagel. He spoke of the recent decision of the church in the Netherlands to ordain women ministers, and the long Biblical debate which took place before.

"Both tried to take the Bible as seriously as possible, but interpreted it in different ways," he said.

Because women have to help to serve in the Church there is no question of "rights" but of how we are to serve the Lord, Pastor Fagel went on. He said he was happy that the decision that women should serve as ministers had been made in the Netherlands, and many years before in Belgium.

Mrs. Kiep described the postwar German lay movements in Germany, such as the Evangelical Kirchentag and the evangelical academies. She said that events in Germany had convinced many people that there could be but one Lord in their lives, and He was Jesus Christ. Events of recent years have brought many Germans to a rediscovery of the Lordship of Christ over all of life, she added.

The rise of a "small groups movement" in Protestantism was observed by Dr. Peale. He spoke of small groups of dedicated Christians who were determined to witness to their faith in daily work. He saw this as a health sign in a time when thousands could be brought into the Church only to practice "an emasculated form of faith and dedication".

The idea of small groups was the impetus of Methodism, Dr. Peale said, recalling that John Wesley more often met with small groups in homes and fields than with large crowds.

Groups like those gathered at the Protestant pavilion - international and interdenominational - are the "real summit" conference, he declared. "Brothers and sisters gathered together in Christ," he said, "can bring nations together".

E.P.S., Geneva

In Brief

An organisation to fight the possible ordination of women in the Lutheran Church of Sweden has been formed at Orebro at a meeting attended by about 600 pastors and laymen. A committee chaired by Bishop Bo Giertz of Gothenburg will prepare a programme of action to prevent cooperation with women ministers if the proposal to permit their ordination becomes law.

* *

The fourth meeting of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, which includes the Netherlands and South African "Gereformeerde" churches and the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa, opened at Potchefstroom, Union of South Africa, on August 6. On the agenda is a request from the South African "Gereformeerde Kerk" asking the synod to repeat a previous request to member churches not to join the World Council of Churches. Some of its South African and Indonesian member churches already belong to the WCC.

* *

Publication of three new illustrated evangelical magazines for the Belgian Congo has been announced by the Africa Literacy Campaign, which has published the illustrated "Envol" since 1954. The new publications are in local languages, with a combined initial circulation of 50,000 copies. The Protestant Missions of the Congo and the Africa Literacy Campaign are joint sponsors.

* *

Following failure of the bishops from the Anglican church in China to arrive as expected for the Lambeth Conference in London, a message has been received to say that "pressure of work" has made it impossible for them to come.

* *

United Church Women of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States has urged the setting up of a permanent United Nations Police Force, the establishment of an "adequate" UN observation force in the Middle East and the withdrawal of American and British troops from the area "as swiftly as possible".

* *

The trial of 92 South Africans accused of high treason opened last week in Pretoria, capital of the Union of South Africa. The accused, including a number of well-known Christians, could incur serious punishment or the death penalty if found guilty. The defence is being conducted by nine eminent barristers. A fund opened to cover defence costs and provide for families has so far realised £64,000 (\$179,000).

* *

"What can we Christians do for peace?" was the theme of a study conference held in Bückeburg, Germany, and attended by Russian, French, German and American churchmen, including the Lutheran Archbishops of Tallinn (Archbishop Kiivit) and Riga (Archbishop Turs) and Rastorguev, Archpriest of the Russian Orthodox Church. The conference was chaired by Dr. Ernst Wilm, president of the Evangelical Church of Westphalia.

* *

The Saint Sergius Institute of Orthodox Theology in Paris, a centre for the higher study of Orthodox theology, unique in Western Europe, is extending its courses this autumn with a course of instruction in French, and possibly in English and German. This section will include a full cycle of theological studies in French parallel to courses which have been given in Russian for over thirty years. It will be open to Orthodox students whose mother tongue is not Russian, and to people of all confessions who wish to make a systematic study of Orthodoxy.

E.P.S., Geneva

Document

Constructive Action in the Middle East

A Statement by a Group of American Christians
(See Page 1, this issue)

1. Given the currents and cross-currents of a complex and rapidly changing scene, we must recognize that adequate solutions may be unattainable under present circumstances and that governments, faced by limited alternatives, have the difficult responsibility of choosing those measures which hold greatest promise of furthering more permanent settlements in the interest of peace and justice. We should pray that all leaders in positions of responsibility may be guided and strengthened by Almighty God to make wise decisions, wise both in relation to immediate dilemmas and in relation to the longer-range interests of the peoples concerned.
2. In face of the military measures now in process, we should urge diligent effort promptly to contain and alleviate highly dangerous tensions in the region. The significance of the Middle East in the world balance of power and the temptations which its vulnerability presents to contending power blocs, underscore the importance of frank and persistent consultations at every available level. To this end the procedures and instruments of the United Nations should be utilised to the full, together with both the regular channels of diplomacy and such special modes of consultation as a conference of heads of state within the U.N. framework.

3. In such consultations, full consideration and place should be given to the interests and desires of the peoples of the region. Greater effort should also be devoted both to bilateral and multilateral consultations with the governments of the Middle East, so that greater understanding and cooperation may develop.

4. We in the churches should both support the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of Middle Eastern nations and promote alertness to the extent to which the response of national governments falls below the needs and aspirations of their own people. It is possible for Western diplomacy to deal correctly with governments in power, and at the same time to support in assistance policies those reforms which are essential to make assistance effective and conducive to the welfare of Middle Eastern peoples.

5. Measures taken in the Middle East by friendly governments to preserve order and orderly process, in response to the request of a government in power, should be subject to international review and should be terminated when the United Nations is in a position to ensure the political independence and territorial integrity of the state concerned. When friendly governments or international authorities take such measures, they should seek in all appropriate ways to assure that the peoples involved will, with reasonable promptness, be offered opportunity freely to choose their own government and determine their own future with due regard to their responsibilities as members of the international community.

6. We should encourage an awareness that the practice of self-determination may result in solutions different from those desired in the West. It is not essential to Western interests that the governments of the Middle East be "pro-Western". What is important is that they should be willing and able to maintain and develop the genuine interests of the Middle East in harmony with those of the world community.

7. We must further recognize that while the political foundations of contemporary states in the Middle East are relatively new and often unstable, there are strong linguistic and cultural ties which transcend national lines. The cultural appeal of the ideal of Arab unity, for which the term "nationalism" is inadequate, is one of the strong undercurrents of the Middle East which must be taken into account and helped to grow in constructive ways. The values in some form of Middle Eastern federation of sister states are too important to be ignored because of the dangers.

8. Some form of regional association is doubly important from an economic point of view, because the Arab states separately are for the most part not viable economically, at least in terms of the justified aspirations of the awakening peoples. Developmental assistance should be geared to the needs and possibilities of regional economic development, as well as to programmes designed to improve the livelihood of the common people.

9. The festering bitterness between the Arab states and Israel requires firm and courageous action by the international community. International security commitments to provide mutual protection against aggression are essential to remove the threat of hostile action from one side or the other.

10. The tragic plight of the Arab refugees is an unrelenting claim on Christian service. It is also a concern calling for action at the political level. Plans for developmental assistance should give particular attention to constructive programmes for resettlement or repatriation of those made homeless by past events in Palestine.

E.P.S., Geneva